JOHN
MILTON

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John Milton.

LITTLE JOURNEYS to the Homes of ENGLISH AUTHORS

John Milton

Written by ELBERT HUBBARD and done into a Printed Book by the ROYCROFTERS at their Shop, which is in EAST AURORA, Erie Co., New York, U. S. A.

A. D. 1901

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Thus with the year
Seasons return; but not to me returns
Day, or the sweet approach of even or morn,
Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;
But cloud instead, and ever-during dark
Surrounds me; from the cheerful ways of men
Cut off, and for the book of knowledge fair
Presented with a universal blank
Of Nature's works, to me expunged and rased,
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.
So much the rather thou, Celestial Light,
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate; there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.

—Paradise Lost: Book III.

JOHN MILTON

HAKESPEARE and Milton lived at the same time, though the difference in their ages was such that we may not speak of them as contemporaries. John Milton was eight years old when William Shakespeare died. The Miltons lived in Bread Street, and out of the back garret window of their house could catch a glimpse of the Globe Theatre.

JOHN MILTON

The father of John Milton might have known Shakespeare—might have dined with him at the "Mermaid," played skittles with him on Hampstead Heath, fished with him from the same boat in the river at Richmond; and then John Milton, the lawyer, might have discreetly schemed for passes to the "Globe" and gone with his boy John, Junior, to see "As You Like It" played, with the Master himself in the role of old Adam. Bread Street was just off Cheapside, where the Mermaid Tavern stood, and where Beaumont, Fletcher, Ben Jonson and other roysterers often lingered and made the midnight echo with their mirth. In all probability, John Milton, Senior, father of John Milton, Junior, knew Shakespeare well. But the Miltons owned their home; were rich, influen-

tial, eminently respectable; attended Saint Giles' Church, and really did n't care to cultivate the society of play-actors who kept bad hours, slept in the theatre, and had meal-tickets at half a dozen taverns.

There were six children born into the Milton family, three of whom died in infancy. Of the survivors, the eldest was Anne, the second John, the third Christopher ❧ ❧

Anne was strong, robust and hearty; John was slender, pale, with dreamy, dark gray eyes and a head too big for his body; Christopher was so-so. And, in passing, it is well to explain, once for all, that Christopher made his way straight to the front in life, taking up his father's business and being appointed a Court Officer. Thence he was promoted to the Woolsack, became rich, cultivated a double chin, was knighted and passed out full of honors. The chief worriment and source of shame in the life of Sir Christopher Milton came from the unseemly conduct of his brother John, who was much given to producing political and theological pamphlets. And once in desperation Sir Christopher Milton requested John Milton to change his family name, that the tribe of Milton might be saved the disgrace of having in it "a traducer of the State, an enemy of the King, and a falsifier of Truth." Sir Christopher Milton was an excellent and worthy man, and I must apologize for not giving him more attention at this time; but lack of space forbids.

Sickly boys who are wise beyond their years are ever

the pets of big sisters, and the object of loving, jealous, zealous care on the part of their mothers. John Milton talked like an oracle while yet a child, and one biographer records that even as a babe he sometimes mildly reproved his parents for levity.

He was a precocious child, and have we not been told that precocity does not fulfill its promises? But this boy was an exception. He was incarnated into a family that prized music, poetry, philosophy, and yet held fast to the Christian faith. His father set psalms to music, his sister wrote madrigals, and his mother played sweet strains on a harp to waken him at morningtide. The entire household united in a devotion to poetry and art. Possibly this atmosphere of high thinking was too rarefied for real comfort—the gravity of the situation being sustained only by a stern effort.

But no matter—father, mother and sister joined hands to make the pale, handsome boy a prodigy of learning—one that would surprise the world and leave his impress on the time.

And they succeeded.

Of the three Milton children that passed away in childhood, I cannot but think that they succumbed to overtraining, being crammed quite after the German custom of stuffing geese so as to produce that delicious diseased tidbit known to gourmets as pate de foie gras. John Milton stood the cramming process like a true hero. His parents set him apart for the Church—therefore he must be learned in books, familiar with lan-

guages, versed in theories. They desired that he should have knowledge, which they did not know is quite a different thing from wisdom.

So the boy had a private tutor in Greek and Latin at nine years of age, and even then began to write verse. At ten years of age his father had the lad's portrait painted by that rare and thrifty Dutchman, Cornelius Jansen. We have this picture now, and it reveals the pale, grave, winsome face with the flowing curls that we so easily recognize.

No expense or pains were spared in the boy's education. The time was divided up for him as the hours are for a soldier. One tutor after another took him in hand during the day; but the change of study and a glad respite of an hour in the morning and the same in the afternoon, for music, bore him up.

He was the pride of his parents, the delight of his tutors.

Three years were spent at St. Paul's School; then he was sent to Cambridge. From there he wrote to his mother, "I am penetrating into the inmost recesses of the Muses; climbing high Olympus, visiting the green pastures of Parnassus and drinking deep from Pierian Springs."

This is terrible language for a child of fourteen. A boy who should talk like that now would be regarded with anxious concern by his loving parents. The present age is incredulous of the Infant Phenomenon. And no fond parent must for a moment imagine that by fol-

lowing the system laid out for the education of John Milton, can a John Milton be produced. The Miltonian curriculum, if used to-day, would be sufficient ground for action on the part of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

But John Milton, though but a weak-eyed boy with a chronic headache, had a deal of whip-cord fiber in his make-up. He stood the test and grubbed at his books every night until the clock tolled twelve. He was born at a peculiar time, being the child of the Reformation married to the Renaissance. The toughness and grimness of Calvin were united in him with the tenderness of Erasmus. From out of the Universal Energy, of which we are particles, he had called into his being qualities so diverse that they seem never to have been before or since united in one person.

He remained at Cambridge seven years. The beauty of his countenance had increased so that he was as one set apart. His finely chiseled features, framed in their flowing curls, challenged the admiration of every person he met. A writer of the time described him as "a grave and sober person, but one not wholly ignorant of his own parts."

There is a sly touch in this sentence that sheds light upon "The Lady of Christ's." John Milton was a bit of a poseur, as Schopenhauer declares all great men are and ever have been. With the masterly mind goes a touch of the fakir or charlatan. Milton knew his power—he gloried in this bright blade of the intellect.

JOHN MILTON

He was handsome—and he knew it. And yet we will not cavil at his velvet coats, or laces, or the golden chain that adorned his slender, shapely person. These things were only the transient, spring-time adornments that passion puts forth.

And yet I see that one writer mentions the chaste and ascetic quality of Milton's early life as proof of a cold and measured nature. Seemingly the writer does not know that intense feeling often finds a gratification in asceticism, and that vows of chastity are proof of passion. There are many ways of working off one's surplus energy—Milton was married to his work. He traversed the vast fields of Classic Literature, read in the original from Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, French, Spanish, Latin and Italian. He delved into abstruse mathematics, studied music as a science and labored at theology. In fact, he came to know so much of all religions that he had faith in none. He seemed to view religion in the cold, calculating light of a syllogistic problem—not as a warm pulsing motive in life. His real religion was music, a fact he once frankly acknowledged.

On the pinions of music he was carried out and away beyond the boundaries of time and space, and there he found that rest for his soul, without which he would have sunk to earth and been covered by the kindly, drifting leaves of oblivion.

For some, the secrets of music, the wonder of love, and the misty, undefined prayers of the soul constitute

true religion. When you place a creed in a crucible and afterward study the particles on a slide encased in balsam, you are apt to get a residuum or something —a something that does not satisfy the heart.

Milton got well acquainted with theology. It was interesting, but not what he had supposed. He came to regard the Church as a useful part of the Government —divine, of course, as all good things are divine. But to become a priest and play a part—he would not do it. He was honest—stubbornly honest.

Seven years he had been at Cambridge, and now that he was just ready to step into a "living,"—right in the line of a promotion of which his beauty and intellect tokened a sure presage,—he balked.

It was a great blow to his parents. His mother pleaded; his father threatened; but they soon perceived that this son they had brought forth had a will stronger than theirs. Their fond dreams of his preferment—the handsome face of their boy above an oaken pulpit, with thousands feeding on his words, the public honors, and all that—faded away into tears and misty nothingness. But parenthood is doomed to disappointment—it does not endure long enough to see the end. Youth is so headstrong and wilful: it will not learn from the experience of others.

And all these years of preparation and expense! Better had he died and been laid to rest with the three now in the churchyard.

Before Milton had served his seven years' apprentice-

ship at Cambridge, his parents moved to the village of Horton—twenty miles out of London, Windsor-way.

The village of Horton has not changed much with the years, and a tramp across the fields from Eton by way of Burnham Beeches and Stoke Pogis, where Gray wrote "The Elegy," is quite worth while. It is a land of lazy woods, and winding streams and hedge-rows melodious with birds. One treads on storied ground, and if you wish you can recline beneath gnarled old oaks where Milton mused and scribbled, and wrote the first draft of "L' Allegro" and "Il Penseroso."

Milton loitered here at Horton for six years, and in that time produced just six poems.

He was thirty-two years of age, and had never earned a sixpence. But what booted it! His father & mother's home was his: they gladly supplied his every want; and his mother, especially, was ever his kindly critic and most intimate friend. His days were spent in study, dreams, lonely walks across green fields, and home-comings when, with his mother's hand in his, he would talk or recite to her in order to clarify the thought that pressed upon him. Very calm, very peaceful and very beautiful were those days. "The pensive attitude of mind brings the best result—not the active," he used to say. It was then he wrote to his old friend, Diodati, "You asked what I am about—what I am thinking of? Why, with God's help, I am thinking of immortality. Forgive the word, it is for your ear alone

—I am pluming my wings for flight." The good mother had misty, prophetic visions of what this flight might be, and had ceased to counsel her son against the sin of idleness. But she did not live to see her prophecies confirmed, for in this time of peace and love, when the vibrant air was filled with hope, she passed Beyond.

Long years after, John Milton exclaimed, "Oh! Why could she not have lived to know!" And the poignant grief of this son, then a man in years (with his thirtieth birthday well behind) turned on the thought that he had disappointed Her—the mother who had loved him into being.

JOHN MILTON

ILTON'S woes began with his marriage—they have given rise to nearly as much discussion as his poetry. In his "Defensio Secunda," he tells, with a touch of pride, of the absolute innocency that continued until his thirty-fifth year. When we consider how his combined innocence and ignorance plunged him into a sudden marriage with a bit of pink and white protoplasm, aged seventeen, we cannot but regret that he had not devoted a little of his valuable time to a study of femininity. And in some way we think of Thackeray, when he was being shown the marvelous works of a certain amateur artist. "Look at that! look at that!" cried the zealous guide, "and he never had a lesson in art in his life!" Thackeray adjusted his glasses, looked at the picture carefully, sighed and said, "What a pity he didn't have just a little good instruction!"

Milton the student, versed in abstractions and full of learned lore, went up the Thames seeking a little needed rest. Five miles from Oxford lived an ebb-tide aristocratic family by the name of Powell. Milton had long known this family, and, it seems, decided to tarry with them a day or so. Just why he sought their company no one ever knew, and Milton was too proud to tell. The brown thrush, rival of the lark and mocking-bird, seldom seeks the society of the blue-jay. But it

did this time. The Powells were a roaring, riotous, roystering, fox-hunting, genteel, but reduced family, on the eve of bankruptcy, with marriageable daughters.

The executive functions of love-making are best carried on by shallow people; so mediocre women often show rare skill in courtship and sometimes succeed in bagging big game. But surely Mary Powell had no conception of the greatness of Milton's intellect—she only knew that he was handsome, and her parents said he was rich.

There were feasting and mirth when Milton arrived back in town accompanied by his bride and various of her kinsmen. In all marriage festivals there is something pathetically absurd, and I never see a sidewalk awning spread without thinking of the one erected for John Milton and Mary Powell, who were led through it by an Erebus that was not only blind, but stone deaf.

John Milton was an ascetic, and lived in a realm of reverie and dreams; his wife had a strong bias toward the voluptuous, reveling in a world of sense, and demanding attention as her right. Milton began diving into his theories and books, and forgot the poor child who had no abstract world into which to withdraw. Suddenly bereft of the gay companionship that her father's house supplied, she felt herself aggrieved, alone; and tears of vexation and homesickness began to stream down her pretty cheeks.

When summoned into her husband's presence she had nothing to say, and Milton, the theorist, discovered

that what he had mistaken for the natural reticence and bashfulness of maidenhood, was mere inanity and lack of ideas. But the loneliness of the poor country girl, shut up in a student's den, is a deal more touching than the scholar's wail about "the silent and insensate" wife. The girl was being deprived of the rollicking freedom to which she had been used, but the great man was waking the echoes with his wail for a companionship he had never known.

Yet the girl was shrewd. All women are shrewd, I am told, and some are wise and some are not; and many women there be who consider finesse an improvement on frankness. At the end of a month, Milton's wife contrived to have her parents send for her to return home on a visit that was to last only until come Michaelmas. But Michaelmas arrived and the young bride refused to return, sending back saucy answers to the great author of "Il Penseroso."

In the meantime Milton wrote pamphlets urging that divorce should be granted on the grounds of incompatibility, and pronouncing as inhuman the laws that gave freedom from marital woes on no less ignoble grounds than that a man should violate his honor.

There is pretty good evidence that a part of Milton's argument on the subject of divorce was written out while his wife was under his roof. This reveals a slight lack of delicacy as well as the author's habit to make copy out of his private griefs; but it must be granted that Milton goes to the very bottom of the subject,

even to stating the fact that those happily married have neither pity nor patience with those mismated. "If you want sympathy," he says, "you must go to those who are regarded as not respectable." Any man who writes on philosophy can find his every cue in Plato, and he who discusses divorce from a radical standpoint can find himself anticipated by Milton in the Seventeenth Century. Every view is taken, even down to the suggestion of a probationary marriage, which Milton thought might come about when civilization had ceased to crawl and begun to walk.

One seeks in vain to learn if the unhappy wife of Milton ever read her husband's bitter tracts. It is probable she never did and would not have comprehended their import if she had; and it is still more likely that she never came to realize that she was wedded to the greatest man of the age. A truce was patched up, on the bankruptcy of her father, and she came back penitent, and was taken into favor. Not only did she come back, but she brought her family; and the ravenous Royalists consumed the substance of the spiritual and ascetic Puritan.

Had Milton then died, it is probable that the gladsome widow would have been consoled and married again very shortly, just as did the widows of Van Dyck and Rubens,—not knowing that to have been the wife of a king was honor enough for one woman.

But after fifteen years of domestic "neglect," during which she doubtless benefited her husband by stirring

in him a noble discontent, she passed from earth; and it was left for John Milton to repeat twice more his marital venture, with a similar result. And in this, Fate sends back a fact that leers like Mephistopheles, by way of answer to Milton's pamphlets on divorce: Why should the state grant a divorce, when great men refuse to learn by experience, and, given the opportunity, only repeat the blunders they have already made?

OD in His goodness has in certain instances sent great men angels of light for assistants—mates who could comprehend and sympathize with their ideals. But it is expecting too much to suppose that Nature can look out for such a trifle as that the right man should marry the right woman. Nature possibly never considered a time contract, and she is a careless jade, anyway. She moves blindly along with never a thought for the individual.

JOHN MILTON

Audubon the naturalist records that one-third of all birds hatched tumble out of the nest before they can fly, and once on the ground the parent birds are unable either to warm, feed or protect them.

Read the lives of the Great Men who have lived during the past three thousand years, and listen closely, and you will hear the wild wail of neglected and unappreciated wives. A woman can forgive a beating, but to be forgotten—never. She hates, by instinct, an austere and self-contained character. Dignity and pride repel her; preoccupation keeps her aloof; concentration on an idea is unforgivable.

The wife of Tolstoy seeking to have her husband adjudged insane, is not a rare instance in the lives of thinkers. To think thoughts that are different from the thoughts one's neighbors think is surely good reason why the man should be looked after. Recently we

have had evidence that the wife of Victor Hugo regarded the author of "Les Miserables" with suspicion, and at one time actually made preparations to let him enjoy his exile alone—she would back to Paris and enjoy life as every one should. At Guernsey there was no society!

When Isaac Newton called upon his lady love and in a fit of abstraction, looking about for a utensil to push the tobacco down in his pipe, chanced upon the lady's little finger, the law of gravitation was abrogated at once and Newton and his pipe were sent like nebulæ, whirling into space.

When the Great Inventor, absorbed in a problem as to Electricity (that thing which to us is only a name and of which we know nothing), forgets home, wife, child, supper; and midnight finds him in his laboratory, where he has been since sunrise—just imagine, if you please, the shrill greeting that is in cold storage for him when he stumbles home, haggard and worn, at dawn. How can he explain why he did this thing and answer the questions as to who was there, and what good it all did anyway!

Thought is a torture, and requires such a concentration of energy that there is nothing left for the soft courtesies of marriage. The day is fleeting, and the night cometh when no man can work. The hot impulse to grasp and materialize the dream ere it fades, is strong upon the man.

Of course he is selfish—he sacrifices everything, as

Palissy did when fuel was short and the clay just at the turning point. Yes, the artist is selfish: he sacrifices his wife and society, and himself, too, to get the work done. Four-o'clocks, mealtime, bedtime, and all the household system as to pink teas, calls and etiquette, stand for naught. And down the corridors of Time comes to us the shrill wail of neglected wives, and the crash of broken hearts echoes like the sound of a painter falling through a skylight. All this is the price of achievement.

JOHN MILTON

JOHN MILTON

AKING a little look backward into Milton's life, we find that until his thirty-third year he had not tasted of practical life at all. About that time his father in a sort of desperation packed him off to the Continent, in charge of a trusty attendant, who acted in the dual capacity of servant and friend. The letters he carried to influential men in Paris, Florence, Venice and Rome secured him the Speaker's eye, and his beauty and learning did the rest. His march was that of a conquering hero. In Paris he surprised the savants by addressing them in their own tongue, and reciting from their chief writers. This was repeated in Italy; and at Florence, as a sort of half-challenge for permission to occupy the highest seat, he was invited to read from his own compositions, which he did with such grace and power that thereafter all doors flew open at his touch.

Returning to England after an absence of fifteen months, he found his father's household broken up, and through bad investments, the family fortune sadly depleted. But travel had added cubits to his stature: the mixture with men had put him into possession of his own, and he now felt well able to cope with the world. He secured modest lodgings in St. Bride's Churchyard, and set to work to make a living and a name by authorship. His head teemed with subjects

for poems, but cash advances were not forthcoming from publishers, and, to bridge over, he tried tutoring. It was at this time that "Paradise Lost," the one matchless epic of English literature, was conceived. Rough jottings were made as to divisions and heads, and a few stanzas were written of the immortal poem that was not to be completed for a score of years.

The first volume of Milton's poems was issued in 1645, when he was thirty-seven years of age. But before this he was known as the author of some pamphlets which had made political London reel. The writer was at once seen to be a man of remarkable learning and marvelous intellect, and the work secured Milton a few friends and divers enemies.

From a man of leisure Milton had suddenly become a worker, whose every daylight hour was crammed with duties. His skill as a teacher brought him all the pupils he cared for, and he moved into better quarters in Aldersgate. He was immersed in his work, was making valuable acquaintances among literary people, was revered by his pupils, and the happiness was his of knowing that he was influential and independent. A fine intoxication comes to every brain-worker when the world acknowledges with tangible remittances that the product of his mind has a value on the Rialto. Such was Milton's joy in 1643.

The "Comus," "Il Penseroso," "L'Allegro" and "Lycidas" had established his place as a poet; and the power of his pen had been proven in sundry re-

ligious and political controversies. In his household were two sons of his sister and several other pupils who had sought his tutorship. He was contented in his work, pleased and happy with the young friends who sat at his board, and in an hour or two snatched each day from toil, for music and reverie.

EIZE upon the moments as they fly, O John Milton, and hug them to your heart! Those were days of gold when your mother was your patient listener and friend. Her love enveloped you as an aura; and her voice, soft and low, upheld you when courage faltered. But these, too, are glorious days —days full of work, and health, and hope, and high endeavor. But these days of peace and freedom are the last you shall ever know. Even now they flee as a shadow and fade into mist! Gross stupidity, silent and insensate, sits waiting for you at the door; calumny is near; taunting hate comes riding fast!

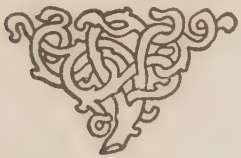
The sympathy for which you yearn shall be yours only in dreams, and you shall be cheated of all the tenderness for which your heart prays. The love and gentleness which you associate with your mother, you ascribe in innocence and ignorance to all women; but Fate shall undeceive you, O John Milton, and make mock of all your high ideals. You dote on liberty, but liberty is not for you. You shall see the funeral of the Republic; the defamation of your honor; the proscription of all the sacred things you prize. Your companions shall not be of your own choosing, but shall be those who neither know nor value the sweet, subtle mintage of the mind. Around you mad riot shall surge, a hatred for liberty shall prevail—an enthusiasm for

slavery. The glorious leaders of your Puritan faith shall be condemned and executed, hanged, cut down from the gallows alive, and quartered amid the hoarse insults of the people they sought to serve; and you yourself shall be hunted like a wild beast. You shall see the prisons filled to overflowing with men and women whose only crime was their love of truth. And a libertine shall sit on the throne of the England that you love. These things you shall see with those mild, dark eyes and then night, eternal night, shall settle down upon you; and for those idle orbs no day shall dawn nor starry night appear, nor face of man nor child shall be reflected there. Your sightlessness shall give those who owe you gratitude and love, opportunity to filch your gold; and, lastly, fire shall rob you of your books, and well-nigh all your treasures.

Like another Lear, your daughters shall neither esteem nor respect you, and the lines you dictate shall be to them but the idle vaporings of a mind diseased. Your acute ears shall hear these daughters express the wish that you were dead; and then in your blindness you will give yourself into the keeping of a woman as dull, inane and unfeeling as the foolish child you first chose as wife. But with it all your obstinacy shall constitute your power; and that beauty which was yours in youth shall be with you to the last. You shall feel all the torments of the damned and become inured to the scorching flames of hell! But, as recompense, the splendors of the Celestial Kingdom shall

open upon your inward vision, and your soul shall behold that which the eyes of earth have lost. Something great and proud shall go out from your presence to all the discerning ones who shall approach you; and your end shall be like the setting of the sun, bright, calm, poised & resplendent.

JOHN MILTON



SO HERE ENDETH THE LITTLE JOURNEY TO THE HOME OF JOHN MILTON, AS WRITTEN BY ELBERT HUBBARD, THE TITLE PAGE, INITIALS & ORNAMENTS BEING DESIGNED BY SAMUEL WARNER, AND THE WHOLE DONE INTO A BOOKLET BY THE ROYCROFTERS AT THEIR SHOP, WHICH IS IN EAST AURORA, NEW YORK, IN THE MONTH OF DECEMBER, MCMI.

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By
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